

Newburyport

and

City Government

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THE
CITY OF NEWBURYPORT

An Address delivered at the Celebration of the
Fiftieth Anniversary of the Incorporation of
Newburyport as a City, June 24, 1901,
by Albert E. Pillsbury.

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ADDRESS

OF

ALBERT E. PILLSBURY.

The event which we celebrate today, the new birth of the town into a city, is more than a change in the form of government. Cities were the earliest seats of what we call civilization. "Civis"—the citizen—was a title of honor. The walled city was the stronghold and defence of learning and the arts. The ancient world survives in the history of its cities. To us it is little more than Ilium, Babylon, Carthage, Athens, Rome. Cities were and are the centers of wealth and power. They are the distinguished members of the state. So the admission of a town into the sisterhood of cities has an interest and significance beyond that which attends the mere increase of numbers. It is the opening of a new day. The community takes a higher rank, and with it every inhabitant acquires a new distinction. The local pride and public spirit of a home-loving people naturally unite to set apart such an event for public commemoration.

Newburyport has another and a peculiar reason for observing it. This anniversary is more than the mere recurrence of a date. Fifty years ago a new town had

begun to arise here, on the foundations of the old; a town of different interests, different customs, largely of different people. The city charter marked the full opening of the new industrial age, of which half a century is now completed.

The celebration of these civic anniversaries may mean much or little, according to the spirit which inspires it. They are natural halting-places in the procession of events, where we stop and look backward a moment over our course. But we move forward, not backward. Such a day is not for idle boasting, as one who putteth off his harness. It is a day to look forward, and to gird up the strength for new tasks; fortunate they who can look forward with tranquil eyes. If Newburyport were a decaying city, her character gone, her enterprise extinct, her great history but a perishing memory; if we could not look to the past without regret nor to the future without apprehension; this would be an idle and unmeaning holiday, soon over and soon forgotten. But if, on the other hand, we find in the record of fifty years, and in forecast of the years to come, that which will sustain hope, strengthen confidence, and stimulate courage; if our holiday banners are the ensigns of an advancing march, and our bells and cannon speak with the voice of resolve no less than exultation; nay, if taking counsel even of our mistakes, we can gather from the experience of the past new wisdom for the benefit of the future, then indeed will this be no empty celebration, but a day to be marked and remembered in the city's calendar.

I ask leave to speak here as one of this family. When Edward Rawson, town clerk and local magistrate of Newbury, removed to Boston in 1651 to take the place of Colonial Secretary, he sold his homestead on the "country road," now High street, to my first ancestor in

this country, whose lineal descendants have possessed it down to this day. I regret that his only claim to peculiar distinction seems to have been in getting himself fined, in the sum of "one noble," for his part in that thirty-years war which shook the foundations of old Newbury church, the Parker-Woodman controversy. But he stood for the rule of the majority, and time has vindicated him. Three generations of my ancestors, and many more of my kindred, have mingled their bones with your soil. All of my name and family in America look to this spot as the cradle of their race in the new world. It is no unlineal hand that I extend to you in embracing the opportunity to acknowledge, if I cannot repay, the natural debt which we all owe to the home of our fathers.

It was an ancient superstition that great events are attended by storms and portents. Those who observe such things may like to recall that in the midst of the movements at the state capital which brought this city into existence, in the spring of 1851, a great tempest swept over this region, the like of which, according to local tradition, was never known here before. Probably most of us will agree that no special significance or effect upon the fortunes of Newburyport is to be ascribed to this convulsion of nature. There is another contemporaneous fact of more interest which did affect them. It was only a narrow chance, hardly more than an accident as it now appears, that gave birth to this city. It will not be without interest to relate how the event came about which furnishes the occasion for this festival.

On the fourteenth day of January, 1851, Abner Keniston and one hundred and eighty-four others, "inhabitants of that part of Newbury called Belleville parish," presented to the General Court their petition, praying that "the territory aforesaid, bounded southeasterly by New-

buryport, from the Merrimac river to Anvil Rock in common pasture, being the southwesterly corner of Newburyport, and thence by a straight line to the northeasterly corner of Newbury in Birchen meadow, may be set off from Newbury and incorporated into a town by the name of Belleville."

This was the latest in a long series of applications to the legislature by the people of Newburyport or adjacent parts of Newbury, indicating discontent with their situation under the act of 1764, by which Newburyport was made a town of an area variously stated at from six hundred and thirty to six hundred and forty-seven acres, the smallest ever known to the province or commonwealth. The prosperous village of Newburyport had soon overflowed these narrow borders. This overflow, bound to Newburyport in interest but to Newbury in law, was a disturbing element in the old agricultural town. There was jealousy and bickering in the management of its affairs, between the men who plowed the land and the men who plowed the sea. Petitions for annexation of parts of Newbury to Newburyport were presented to the legislatures of 1794, 1821, 1827, 1832, 1834, 1835, 1843, and 1847, without success. In 1828 some inhabitants of Belleville, or the "fifth parish," asked for incorporation as a separate town, to which Newbury assented; but others asked for annexation to Newburyport, and both movements were defeated. In 1846 the legislature was asked to reunite Newbury and Newburyport, but Newbury would not have you.

Upon the petition for the incorporation of the town of Belleville, in 1851, notice was ordered to Newbury, and on February 8th the town voted not to oppose it. In this petition, and this action of the town of Newbury upon it, there was a large possibility that Newburyport

might never come into existence as a city. The only surviving member of the legislative committee on towns of that year* is authority for the statement that upon first consideration of this petition it appeared that the differences of three-quarters of a century between Newburyport and Newbury were likely to be merged in the new town of Belleville. In this posture of affairs, a seemingly trifling intervention changed, in hardly more than a day, the whole course of events and of your future history.

The incorporation of cities in Massachusetts had been undertaken reluctantly and with many doubts, which even a constitutional amendment hardly quieted, and not until the town-meeting of Boston, with forty thousand inhabitants, had become an unmanageable body. But Salem and Lowell had followed in 1836, Cambridge in 1846, New Bedford in 1847, Worcester in 1848, Lynn in 1850, and by 1851 the movement was well under way. To Caleb Cushing, then representing Newbury in the legislature, it was suggested by the legislative committee that it would be more in line with current events to enlarge Newburyport and give it a city charter than to create another small town. It would seem that the committee suspended action upon the Keniston petition, that Mr. Cushing might seize the opportunity to make Newburyport a city.

Apparently he lost no time in acting upon this hint. On February 13th he presented a memorial of Jacob Merrill and twenty-two others, who had signed the Keniston petition, withdrawing from it their names and support; a remonstrance of Francis Lord and seventy-three other residents against it; and a similar remonstrance from Sarah Little and eleven other women residents, declaring that "although unused by our former habits

* Hon. James Dinsmoor, of Lowell.

and the customs of the country to active interest in political or municipal affairs, yet we believe it to be our right, and feel it to be our duty, to express our opinions and wishes upon this question." To this early but active assertion of woman's rights this city may owe its existence. Two days later these remonstrances were followed by a petition of Moses Pettingell and one hundred and one others, residents of the Ridge and Joppa, and two days later still by a similar petition of William Goodwin and forty-nine others, residents of the westerly part of Newbury, for annexation of their territory to Newburyport. February 19th, immediately following these petitions and remonstrances, and apparently in pursuance of an understanding with the committee, the petitioners for the town of Belleville were given leave to withdraw. Upon the petitions for annexation, notice was ordered to Newbury and Newburyport, which voted their assent. The annexation bill was reported April 3d, and became a law April 17th. One week later Newburyport appointed, in town-meeting, a committee of ten, headed by Mr. Cushing, to apply for a city charter. Their petition was presented the following day, and a charter was reported May 1st, which became a law May 24th by the approval of Governor George S. Boutwell, who remains among us, full of years and honors, to witness the fiftieth anniversary of the act. June 3d the charter was accepted by the inhabitants, June 16th city officers were elected, and June 24th, fifty years ago this day, the new government was organized, and Newburyport took her place among the cities of the commonwealth.

The new city paid her newly-annexed inhabitants the appropriate compliment of selecting from their number, as the first mayor, that remarkable man whose hand had been so active in procuring the charter. The

versatile genius of Caleb Cushing was never more strikingly illustrated than at this period when, within the space of a year and a half, he is found filling in succession the offices of representative in the legislature, mayor of Newburyport, justice of the supreme judicial court, and attorney general of the United States. Of his colleagues in the original city government of 1851, your esteemed fellow-citizen, Philip K. Hills, alone survives to join in this commemoration.

The city of Newburyport stands out against an historic background, the like of which, in richness of color and variety of interest, belongs to few cities even of this ancient and historic commonwealth. To the eye of the native or descendant it reflects all the hues of this radiant nimbus. The very sound of the name stirs the historic imagination. Without any artificial advantage, never a capital nor even a county-seat, the capital itself hardly excels this city in wealth of historic memories.

Fortunately it is not left to me to relate her history. It is written in the pages of Cushing, his first published work; in Coffin's history of the Newburys, that New England classic, to which all paths of antiquarian research finally lead; in the later work of Euphemia Vale Smith; in the "Reminiscences of a Nonagenarian," a picture, perfect as a cameo, of the actual daily life of the people of old Newburyport; and in that sumptuous volume in which a worthy son and citizen here present* has painted with the hand of affection, for the delight of posterity, the men and scenes hallowed by local tradition, now disappeared or disappearing. The muse of Whittier has cast her spell upon it. It has been sung in the verse of native

* Ex-Mayor John James Currier.

poets, and recited by orators on many occasions — and yet the whole story of Newburyport has never been told. We cannot turn from the picture without a passing glance, nor can we rightly view the city of today without a brief retrospect, however imperfect, of the events which gave it birth.

The history of Newburyport falls naturally into four principal divisions: the colonial period, of settlement and natural growth, of Puritan theology, witchcraft, earthquakes, and the first promptings of freedom, leading up to the incorporation of the town in 1764; the days of the old town in its prosperity, from the close of the Revolution to the great fire and the war of 1812; the years of doubt and discouragement that followed, from which the town emerged with the beginning of manufactures, culminating in the birth of the city; and the half-century now completed. We cannot separate the early history of Newburyport from that of old Newbury, nor make a distinct partition of its honors or memories between them. If a Solomon came to that judgment, each would have it remain one and indivisible. But our Newbury and West Newbury neighbors will indulge us in the recollection that much, perhaps most, that is remarkable in the history of the old town was enacted on this spot, and so is justly part of the heritage and possessions of Newburyport, and as such we must claim the right to speak of it; a claim the more readily to be conceded as we cannot take their history from them though taking it to ourselves.

The situation of the town favored both inland trade and foreign commerce,—“*terra marique*” is appropriately written on the city’s scroll — and here the commerce of Massachusetts practically began; a commerce which not only filled the purse but broadened the horizon. It quickened the narrow and somber life of that Puritan

people with the elements of romance that lie in the wonders and mysteries of the sea. They saw visions of far-off lands, and dreamed of voyages and the prizes of adventure. It was with the peace of 1783 that the golden age of old Newburyport began. For a generation following, its story is unique in the history of New England. Toward the end of the eighteenth century Europe was in arms. The neutrality of the United States, and its natural advantages for commerce, threw into American hands a large share of the carrying trade of the world. The skill of Newburyport shipwrights, and the energy and courage of Newburyport merchants and mariners, opened to this modest provincial town a career of marvelous prosperity. It was a time of great hazards, but of great profits. Out of commercial enterprise a town arose here which almost rivalled the brilliancy of a foreign capital. Then Newburyport, a grand dame arrayed in silks and jewels, holding her court in a splendor almost regal, drew to her feet much of the brightest and best of the character, intellect, and culture of the commonwealth. Here the Tracys, the Daltons, the Jacksons, the Lowells, the Bartletts, the Greenleafs, the Wigglesworths, the Wheelwrights, the Hoopers, the Littles, the Lunts, the Hales, the Browns, and other families of no less worth, formed a constellation whose luster makes a shining page in the history of the town. Stately mansions, fitted and adorned with European luxury, surrounded with gardens and terraces, rose along the "ridge", the villas of opulent merchants stood in the midst of baronial estates in the environs, gorgeous equipages filled the streets, the gentry clothed themselves and their families in broadcloths, velvets, and laces, and dined off plate at banquets mel-
lowed with the choicest vintages of the world, and wealth, intellect, and culture united to make Newbury-

port a social and commercial center hardly inferior in attractions to the metropolis itself. In wealth and population it was second only to Boston and Salem; in commercial and social importance it was hardly second to either.

But all this splendor blossomed from a single root, and it withered almost as soon as it had grown. With the approach of the war of 1812 the clouds gathered over Newburyport. In the midst of the strangulation of commerce by embargoes and non-intercourse acts came the devastating fire of May 31, 1811. Fortune had veiled her face. From these multiplied calamities the old Newburyport never arose. When prosperity returned, it was a new day and a new town. Before the fire, Newburyport had seven thousand six hundred and thirty-four souls and more than seven millions of wealth. It took thirty years to regain her former numbers, and the property valuation of 1811 was never again reached until 1856, nor permanently restored until 1865.

The decline of old Newburyport was the inevitable result of causes of wider operation than the war or the fire. When commerce again spread her wings, after the war of 1812, they bore her away from Newburyport to the greater ports and harbors more favored by nature. The day of small craft was past. The bar at the river's mouth was an obstacle to vessels of larger draft and tonnage which no degree of local enterprise could surmount. Then came the Middlesex canal, diverting the inland trade. For a generation Newburyport was almost at a standstill. Some of her capitalists were ruined, others sought new fields of enterprise, and those who remained could not in a moment repair the disasters which had shattered their fortunes. From the fire to a time near the middle of the century there was doubt,

discouragement, stagnation. But the universal law of compensation was at work. As one thing goes, another comes. The seed of the future prosperity of Newburyport was planted in 1834, the year that saw the erection of the first cotton factory. The smoke of the chimneys of the Essex mill was the signal that manufactures had come in, to take the place of commerce. This mill was soon followed by others, and by shoe manufacture, an ancient industry of the town, on an extended scale. The opening of the Eastern railroad, in 1840, followed by the connection of the city with the Boston & Maine railroad, in 1850, stimulated these and other enterprises, and by 1851 Newburyport was fairly entered upon a new industrial career, destined to excel and to outlast the exceptional but unstable fortunes of the old town. And with this revival of industry the city began.

A survey of the ensuing fifty years, of which this day marks the completion, would show that Newburyport has kept fully abreast of the age in all the lines of civic development. Public spirit and private munificence have combined to endow the city with every agency and appliance for the promotion of the public welfare. The introduction of gas lighting in 1852, since supplemented by electricity; the founding of the public library in 1854, a memorable event in the history of any city; the construction of the City railroad, in 1871, connecting the water-front with the Boston & Maine railroad; the opening, in 1873, of the first horse-railway, between Newburyport and Amesbury, now developed into a network of electric lines extending in all directions; the gift to the city, in the same year, of the Atkinson common as a public pleasure ground; the liberal bequest, in 1880, for the erection of a city almshouse, completed and occupied

in 1889; the introduction of a public water supply, in 1881; the incorporation of the Wheelwright Scientific School, in 1882; the endowment, in 1883, of that most grateful of all public charities, a free hospital, to which public-spirited citizens have since made substantial contributions, crowned by the recent gift of land and means for the erection of a new hospital building; the unique benefaction, in 1885, for the watering of the public streets; the public sewerage system, begun in 1889, now so far extended as to embrace the greater part of the city; these and other public improvements, which time forbids me to enumerate, have marked the progress of the city.

The finer aesthetic sense, which refuses to be satisfied with merely material things, has not been inactive during this period. The statue of Washington has risen in the park; the bronze figure of Garrison, the most illustrious son of Newburyport of the last century, whose appeal for human rights she refused in a moment of madness to hear, stands a perpetual witness to the final triumph of truth; and public fountains, pleasure grounds, and other objects of art and beauty, are ministering to the eye and the taste and stimulating public spirit to emulate the generosity of the benefactors of the city, whose names will be held in grateful remembrance.

The religious activity for which this community was remarkable from the earliest times, if abated in zeal is unimpaired in its wholesome influence upon the public morals and the social welfare of the city. Charitable, scientific, historical, and literary enterprises have continued in undiminished vigor, maintaining the high character of the city for intelligence, public spirit, philanthropy, and all the social virtues.

This is a material age, and Newburyport is an industrial city. A distinguished citizen of Massachusetts has recently remarked that if you wish to stir this generation of Americans to enthusiasm, you must do it with a column of figures. While there is truth in this satire, I shall not assume that the people of Newburyport can be moved only by an account of material growth or commercial profits. But figures may be pregnant with the most significant facts, and these symbols must be employed to measure the material progress of a community like this. The industrial history of Newburyport in these fifty years discloses some interesting and remarkable facts, of which the most notable is the great increase of wealth and industries in contrast with the slow growth of population.

In 1850 the town, by the Federal census, had 9572 inhabitants. It is said in written statements presented to the legislature with the annexation petition, of 1851, agreeing in this though differing in other particulars, that the population of the annexed territory was 2842. Assuming this to be correct, and the weight of evidence seems to support it though the number has been differently stated, the original population of the city in 1851 was 12,414. In 1900 it was 14,478. The gain in half a century is 2064, being 16.62 per cent., or one-sixth, an average of but one-third of one per cent. yearly. Each decade except that following 1860, and each period of five years since 1870 except the last, shows a slight gain. The Federal census of 1900 charges Newburyport with a loss of 74 inhabitants since 1895, which has doubtless been more than made good by this time—certainly it would be if the census were taken today. The increase in the number of ratable polls since 1851 is 1831, a gain of 72 per cent. as against a gain of less than 17 per cent.

in total population; 87 per cent. of the whole gain in numbers being of this class. This is characteristic of a manufacturing population, but it indicates an unusual proportion of those who are not "set in families."

The exhibit of the wealth and industries of the city is in marked contrast with this slight increase of numbers. From 1851 to 1900 real property has increased in value from \$2,596,400 to \$7,286,000, a gain of 180 per cent.; in other words, it has nearly trebled. Personal property, including corporate stocks not appearing in the local valuation, has risen from \$2,880,200 in 1851 to \$3,632,033 in 1900, a gain of \$751,833, or 26 per cent. The whole wealth of the city has risen from \$5,476,600 in 1851 to \$10,918,033 in 1900, or more than 99 per cent. Thus property has substantially doubled while population has increased but one-sixth; in other words, wealth has increased about twelve times as fast as population.

Industrial statistics were not compiled in 1850. The growth of the local industries within the city period can be approximately shown by comparing those of 1845 and 1855 with those of 1900. In 1845 the six leading industries were, in this order, cotton goods, boots and shoes, machinery and metal goods, shipbuilding, snuff and tobacco, clocks, watches and jewelry. The amount of capital invested in all industries, as nearly as known, was \$757,300, the average number of persons employed 1598, the whole annual value of products \$841,258. In 1855 shipbuilding temporarily superseded boots and shoes as second in importance, foods supplanted jewelry, and the order was, cotton goods, shipbuilding, boots and shoes, machinery and metals, snuff and tobacco, food products. The whole capital invested was \$1,467,300, persons employed 2904, value of products \$2,422,632.

In 1900 the order of importance was, boots and shoes, cotton goods, building, clothing, food products and metals, Shipbuilding and tobacco manufactures had disappeared from the six leading industries. Clothing and building had come in, and boots and shoes had forged ahead of cotton goods and taken the first place. The whole capital invested was \$3,863,199, persons employed 3076, value of products \$5,685,768.

In the fifty-five years from 1845 to 1900 the capital invested in manufacturing industries had increased over 410 per cent., or nearly five-fold; the number of persons employed had increased about 93 per cent., or nearly double; the value of products had increased over 575 per cent. or more than six-fold. In the forty-five years from 1855 to 1900 the increase of capital invested was over 163 per cent., or nearly treble; the increase in persons employed was about 6 per cent.; the increase in the value of products was over 134 per cent., or more than double.

It is evident that the increase in manufacturing industries was well under way between 1845 and 1855. They were planted and growing before the city arose. The value of products of the industries has increased in a larger proportion than the capital invested, and in more than six times the proportion of persons employed; a result due, without doubt, to improved machinery and facilities, to the change in the character of the industries, and to skilful management. The value of manufactures has more than doubled while population has increased but one-sixth; in other words, the ratio of increase in the products of manufacture is more than twelve times as great as in population.

One plain conclusion from these facts may well be the subject of congratulation here. The material interests of the city have prospered because there is a healthy

diversity of industries and employments. In the old times everything was centered in commerce, and when commerce shook her elusive wings and flew away from old Newburyport, she took prosperity with her. In the city of today prosperity is safely anchored in the foundations of a score of mills and factories.

We are celebrating the adoption of city government, and some consideration of that subject cannot be out of place. As much that must be said of it is not to its credit, I begin by saying, as fortunately may be said with truth, that city government in Newburyport has developed no occasion for unusual complaint. This city is at least as fortunate as its neighbors. If there is dissatisfaction here with city government, or if it is declining in character, this result may fairly be ascribed to inherent defects of the system. Accordingly, in glancing at this subject, which can be done here only in the broadest perspective, I speak only of city government in general. If it has succeeded here, there is no better reason for this celebration. If it has not, we can make no better use of a moment than to consider the reasons. The subject is of general importance, as the movement of population now sets strongly towards the cities, in which two-thirds of the people of this Commonwealth are dwelling at this moment.

Perhaps city government is not, on the whole, so black as it is painted. The complaints against it are exaggerated in the heat of party warfare, or by the criticism of theorists who forget that perfection cannot be reached in the actual running of governmental machinery. Making due allowance for all this, there are substantial grounds of dissatisfaction, which challenge the attention of all students of public affairs who realize how much

more closely the interests of the average citizen are bound up with the local than with the general government, in a country where the municipality absorbs more than four-fifths of all the direct taxes, and municipal debts are ten times greater than all other public obligations. And it must not be forgotten that the sight of open misgovernment is demoralizing. If tolerated, it will corrupt the springs of public virtue. Unless the people change the character of the government for the better the government will change the character of the people for the worse.

The general discontent with the actual results of city rule is evident from the fact that it is one of the most irrepressible themes of popular discussion. The press teems with it, publicists theorize upon it in volumes of learned essays, statisticians embellish it with figures, legislatures labor with it and give birth to whole libraries of statutes more or less impotent or mischievous, and the failure of all these attempts at reform has led to the suggestion of a variety of other remedies, ranging in force and character from disfranchisement to lynching. It must be conceded that if the genius of this people for self-government has failed anywhere, it is at this point. The general inefficiency of city government in this country stands confessed. Our commonwealth is happily yet free from any great municipal scandal or any flagrant example of misrule, but we cannot be surprised that towns qualified for city government hesitate to adopt it, and that at least one of our cities is today seriously considering the question of surrendering its charter.

The process of degeneration is familiar. Municipal expenditure, necessarily large, usually extravagant, not infrequently reckless, offers an irresistible temptation to the large and growing class of those who wish to live

without work at the public expense. Wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together. A municipal "ring" is evolved, which controls the city government, a "boss" arises who controls the ring, the people are dethroned, power passes from responsible officers to irresponsible and unscrupulous hands, and the way is open for a carnival of misrule. The public moneys are diverted from their proper uses to enrich a horde of political parasites; salaried offices are confiscated as the legitimate spoil of the workers; jobbery takes toll of all municipal expenditure; and even the public schools and the public charities are made to pay tribute of corruption. Public office acquires a bad name. Citizens who have the largest stake in honest government turn their backs in contempt upon the public service and abdicate all active participation in political affairs, and the descendants of the men who waged a seven years' war against threepence a pound on tea quietly submit to be looted of millions by political gangs organized for plunder, whose operations are a public scandal, and whose existence in the face of a well-directed public sentiment would be impossible.

There is one short, if cynical, answer to all this. Popular government will never be better than the people who make it. If the people of the cities are no better than their government, if they have really become indifferent, reckless, and corrupt, if character is declining, if public spirit is becoming extinct, municipal and all other misrule is accounted for. The general popular indifference to misgovernment is a striking phenomenon, the causes of which lie deeper than our inquiry today can extend. But it is yet true, whatever the portents, that if the whole people of any city could be polled upon the direct issue of honest government, they would speak for

it with no uncertain voice. The practical difficulty is that an active and resolute minority, having a personal interest to make the public treasury a subject of private plunder, contrive by superior zeal and organization to control or suppress the political influence of an indifferent and heedless majority. A large proportion of the voting population of most cities has no substantial stake in honest administration. The taxpayers are usually a minority. Those who vote are not those who pay.

The inefficiency of city government is due to a variety of causes. Some of them are inherent and unavoidable; a fact not always remembered. Conditions vary with natural situation, systems of local law, the character of industries and population, and other circumstances. No system would be the best everywhere. Our system has some features which are undesirable anywhere, and for the perpetuation of these, at least, there is no justification. Any efficient remedy must be so simple as to be easily applied, it must recognize unalterable facts and conditions, and it must restore to city government the controlling power of sound public sentiment.

The government of all cities is necessarily expensive. This appears in the financial history of Newburyport, as it must in all cities. Debt and taxation are growing here even more rapidly than wealth and industries. Density of population, by itself, generates new needs and calls for large expenditures, unnecessary and unknown in rural neighborhoods. The streets of a city must be lighted, paved, and cleaned. A city must have a public water supply and a system of sewerage, in the interest of public health. It must have police protection for the preservation of the public peace. It must have an efficient fire department for the protection of property. All these and other like charges, the sum total of which forms a large

part of municipal expenditure, are made necessary by mere congestion of population. The form of government is not responsible for them. And now the steady advance of state socialism, in high places no less than in low, is constantly throwing new burdens upon the public which have been and should be borne by private enterprise. The best that can be done in dealing with the unavoidable burdens is to secure honesty and prevent extravagance. If the city buys no more than it needs, and if it gets an honest equivalent for the purchase price, there is no ground of complaint. And as wealth centers in cities, these charges, under honest administration, are easily borne, and the public benefits which they provide are usually worth much more than their cost.

The most radical of all the difficulties with city government is in the anomalous relation between cities and the state. The accepted legal theory here is that local self-government is not a constitutional right but a political privilege, to be granted or withheld by the legislature in such measure as it sees fit. A city is but a branch of the state government, and as such a mere agency and instrument of the legislative will. It has the form of self-government but not the substance. All its public powers are held at sufferance of the legislature, which may grant such as it pleases, modify or withdraw them as it pleases, or step in on any occasion and exercise by its own hand the powers which it has granted to the city. The gubernatorial veto, not always wisely or justly exercised, adds another complication to legislative control. It has hitherto been understood that the power of the state to compel a city to tax its inhabitants is limited, at most, to the common public needs. But judicial wisdom now declares that objects in the nature of luxuries, to be paid for by compulsory taxation, may be forced upon a city

against its will by legislative decree; that a city may be compelled to adorn itself with parks, for example, or incidentally with improved architecture, at its own expense and according to the legislative taste. If such a power exists, it can have no limit except the legislative pleasure. Fancy a gallery of pictures or statuary selected by a committee of the General Court and the bill sent to the city by order of that body—yet to this we may come.

The judicial view of the relations between the state and the city is contrary to all the facts of our history. In Massachusetts we know that the towns made the state, not the state the towns. Apparently it would have been easy, clearly it would have been more wholesome, to hold in the outset that the privileges of the towns under the ancient charters were not disturbed by adopting the constitution; leaving to them at least such local independence as they had previously enjoyed, and carrying over these powers and privileges of the inhabitants unimpaired upon the erection of a town into a city. But the other view was adopted in the earliest times and has always been maintained; with the result that, whereas under the crown the local communities enjoyed a liberal measure of freedom, under the republic they are but little more than mere vassals and dependencies of the state.

Nor have we any constitutional restraints against special legislation for cities; though there is some compensation for this in escaping the necessity of resort to the absurd devices employed to evade such restraint in states where it exists. It rests with the legislature alone to determine when, upon what pretext, and to what extent it will interfere in the direct government of any city. It may take in charge the appointment and removal of city officers,—and while actual legislative interference

in Massachusetts has not yet extended farther than assumption of the control of the police, it was but the other day that the legislature of a neighboring commonwealth turned out the officers of three great cities, filling their places with its own nominees, and the courts were obliged to sustain this action as within legislative power. The legislature may extend or curtail the tax levy, or the borrowing power; dictate what money the city may or shall spend and for what purposes; lay out streets; construct or order the construction at the city's expense of public buildings or other public works; or compel the city to contribute to the cost of enterprises in which it has no title and may have no real interest. The public property of the city is wholly under legislative control, and may be dealt with and disposed of as the legislature sees fit. While this is a reasonable rule for public property of a character requiring one uniform system of control, the public highways for example, it is not reasonable that a city should be wholly subject to the legislative will as to property held for local purposes. Still more unjust and absurd is it that the city should be subject to compulsory levies of taxation to provide objects of indulgence wholly beyond the proper public necessities, and that it should have no secure title to property paid for by taxation of its inhabitants. Such a system is wrong in principle and pernicious in results.

The direct consequence of unrestrained legislative control of cities is to bring chaos upon municipal administration. How much money shall be raised by taxation, or borrowed, or spent, or for what, may be determined at home or it may be determined at the state capital, according to the exigencies of politics. If a city job is defeated in council or vetoed by the mayor, the promoters persuade a compliant legislature to do it or order it done;

and conversely, if a city undertakes a proper public enterprise to which an active minority is opposed, they invoke, often successfully, the interference of the legislature to prevent it. Where power is scattered responsibility disappears. Neither state-house nor city-hall can be held accountable for what goes wrong. The people, having no real power, cease to feel any responsibility. They become indifferent to their own political duties and even to the character of their candidates for municipal office; knowing that if good men are elected they may be controlled or thwarted by a superior power, and trusting that if bad men are elected the same power can be persuaded to stand in their way.

In some of the later constitutions of western states cities are given a much larger power of self-government than they have elsewhere enjoyed; an interesting experiment, the result of which should shed light upon the path to municipal reform. In important constitutional changes Massachusetts moves with deliberation. It is no easy task to draw the line between powers which ought to be confided to the cities and towns and powers which must remain in the state. A large measure of central control is essential to a symmetrical system. This is no time or place to pursue the discussion of changes in municipal policy so radical as to disturb the constitutional foundations; but no radical and permanent reform can be expected until cities are endowed with more of the rights and powers of responsible self-government.

The adoption of city government involves abandonment of the town-meeting, justly regarded, not only by us who have been brought up under it but by all intelligent students of public questions, as the best form of local rule ever applied to our affairs. It makes every voting citizen a member of the governing body, with a

direct share of the power and of the responsibility. The majority, which always desires good government, is actually in control. For this, city government substitutes a representative system which is not in fact representative. It does not, as a rule, actually reflect the opinions or the desires of the people. Cut off from direct participation in the government, divested of the sense of responsibility which goes hand in hand with power, his part reduced to voting once a year, usually for the candidates of a packed caucus, the average citizen, except in some emergency, lapses into indifference and his weight ceases to be felt in the scale. Under the one system he is on the spot, looking after his own affairs; under the other, while in theory represented by the one-hundredth or five-hundredth part of an alderman or councilman, in truth he counts for no more than a cipher in the sum total of the results. In proportion as the will and conscience of the individual citizen are eliminated from it, the character of the government declines. It ceases to be government by or for the people. An essential factor of the problem is to bring back the people to the actual control of their affairs.

The prevailing American form of city government, a mayor and a council of two branches, is an anachronism, and, as applied to the government of our cities, an absurdity. It is sometimes supposed to be copied from English or other European forms of municipal government. It is really framed upon a model much nearer at hand, though quite as ill-suited to the purpose. In the struggle of centuries for popular rights, our English ancestors worked out the fabric of king, lords, and commons; an executive head and a legislature of two branches, one representing aristocratic power, the other the rights of the people. This general form was brought over to this country in

the colonial charters, and was naturally followed in the earliest state constitutions, and later in the Federal constitution. When cities began to arise, it had become so fixed in the popular conception of government that it was carried into city charters, and there, with some slight variations, it has always remained. A form of government essential to preserve the balance of powers and interests between the great estates of the realm, in dealing with the policies of a nation, may be very ill-adapted to the control of a city under institutions founded on equal rights and universal suffrage. City government, while not wholly a business affair, as is sometimes said, consists so largely in the collection and disbursement of money that the machinery should primarily be adapted to the honest and efficient conduct of such business. Among the people of a city there is no natural division of classes or interests calling for distinct representation; and if there were, such representation is not secured under the present forms. The only actual division is between those who want the government prudently conducted and the public funds honestly applied to their proper uses, and those who do not. The original reason for a legislative body of two chambers,—that each may represent a different class or interest,—does not exist. The remaining reason,—to secure further deliberation, and that each may be a check upon the excesses of the other,—is not satisfied by the existing system. It does not in fact answer this purpose. In fact the two branches divide and weaken responsibility, multiply opportunities for log-rolling, and impair the directness and force which are more essential in the control of city affairs than the larger deliberation which great public questions demand.

Two rules or principles seem essential to efficient municipal organization. First, the whole executive power

and responsibility should be vested in a single head; on the principle of Napoleon's aphorism that "nothing is so bad as a bad general, except two good generals." Second, all legislative power,—the power to determine all questions of the general policy of the city,—should be vested in a single council, so large as to be a real representative body. In short, the system must contain the means of developing the true public sentiment, by responsible public discussion, and the means of efficient execution of the policy and the measures ordained by the deliberative branch.

The powers of the council, being wholly of a legislative character, confined to settling the broader questions of policy which arise in city affairs, its duty is substantially discharged in the enacting of standing ordinances,—and the fewer they are and the less they are meddled with the better,—and in determining, once in each year, the amount and general destination of all appropriations and of the tax levy or loans required to meet them. These questions once disposed of, the whole power and duty of carrying the policy of the council into effect is left to the executive. For all these purposes, a few meetings early in the year would ordinarily be enough. The members of the council being thus relieved of the necessity of constant attendance and attention throughout the year, public-spirited citizens may be induced to accept membership in such numbers as to make it a truly representative body of the whole people, restoring to city government the vigor and directness of control, and the element of personal interest in the governing power, which was lost in abandoning the town-meeting. The number may be as large as can conveniently assemble for public deliberation. In a city of moderate size this would afford room for an ample representation of all elements of the population.

It is idle to talk of wholly eliminating the influence of political parties from any form of municipal government. Our habits of political thought and action will always make themselves felt. The existing party organizations will always be brought to bear with more or less effect. Non-partisan city government must be secured by indirection, if at all. Fix upon the head of the government a degree of responsibility which he cannot evade and dare not abuse, and it will matter little what party label he wears. Make the representative body so broad that no scheme can be carried through it on party lines or from partisan motives, and the government will be as free of partisan influences as any government can be where political parties exist.

It is not for me to advise the people of Newburyport to disturb or experiment with their local government. These suggestions are contributed to the general discussion of a question of the highest importance to the inhabitants of cities. There is much reason to believe that the reform of city government in general, at least in cities of moderate size, must be sought and may be found in the application of the principles thus briefly indicated. If the occasion should arise, this city is perhaps as well adapted as any, in size, character, and situation, to put their merits to proof.

Yet when all discussion touching forms of government is ended, the character of the people remains the vital thing. A thrifty and vigorous race will prosper in spite of bad government. There is in all healthy human society a tendency to improve its condition. It was long ago observed that no form or degree of misgovernment will do so much to make the situation of the people worse as the instinctive effort of every individual to

improve his own situation will do to make it better. It was a remarkable body of men that peopled this region. They were predestined, by their own qualities, to political independence, but they would have grown great in spite of crowns or parliaments. If the folly of a mad king had not driven the American colonists to throw off his rule, if it were possible to conceive of the colonies as continuing dependencies of Great Britain, the character of the Puritan immigration would have raised up here, in the fullness of time, a state so mighty as to overshadow the imperial power of the mother-country herself. It is no light task to hold up the standard raised by such a race. Think of the great men who have gone in and out upon this very spot. If some magic power could summon back to their former haunts the shades of the illustrious dead whose names and memory are among the treasures of this city, what a glorious company would people these homes and streets! Thomas Parker, Samuel Sewall, Edward Rawson, William Dummer, the John Lowells and Francis Cabot Lowell, Tristram Dalton, George Whitefield; Jonathan, Charles, and Patrick Tracy Jackson; Thomas Dawes, Theophilus Bradbury, George Thatcher, Robert Treat Paine, Jacob Perkins, Nicholas Pike, William Wheelwright, Dudley A. Tyng, Edward Bass, Samuel Webber, Cornelius C. Felton, William Plumer, Daniel Dana, John Quincy Adams, Theophilus Parsons, Rufus King, Benjamin and Simon Greenleaf, Caleb Cushing, Lucy Hooper, Hannah F. and Benjamin A. Gould, George Peabody, Benjamin Hale, George R. Noyes, Samuel S. Wilde, William Lloyd Garrison, John Pierpont, Samuel J. May, George Lunt, James Parton, Eben F. Stone,— a galaxy of pioneers, preachers, scholars, poets, philanthropists, jurists, statesmen, scientists, mechanics, merchant princes, captains of industry,

“on fame’s eternal bead-roll worthie to be fyled.” These men have given to Newburyport a character and distinction that will remain so long as the city stands. Cities live in their character, not less than individuals. The home of great men, the theater of great events, the birth-place of ideas or forces which have helped to move the world—these possess an interest which space cannot limit nor time subdue. It was the character of the men and women of Newburyport that gave the town its fame. It was peopled by the flower of the Puritan immigration;—narrow men, perhaps; bigoted; austere; but meaning to be just and determined to be free. Some things they did which timid souls would forget, but nothing which cannot be openly avowed. Much of the wealth of old Newburyport, no doubt, came over the bar in the cabin or hold of the privateer, a hanger-on of war now passed into disrepute, and none too soon—but privateering was then legitimate warfare. Every step in their history was traced in character and courage. Look at them in the times of the embargoes. Foremost as they had been among the patriots of the Revolution, when the war of 1812 was forced upon the people,—an unnecessary war, pursued by measures of folly, more disastrous at home than abroad,—the men of Newburyport stood up and denounced it as foolish and unnecessary. They opposed it openly. They despised the embargo, and trampled it under their feet. And who shall say that this bold and manly stand against the blunders of an incompetent administration was not truer patriotism than the servile complaisance that knows no right or wrong save at the command of power? The patriot is he who sets his country right, and stands in the way when it goes wrong. If this is not patriotism, the Revolution was not. I do not say that these men were all heroes, but they were not

cowards, hypocrites, nor sycophants. They were neither ashamed nor afraid. It is an inspiration to recall them. It is a virtue to emulate them. Long may they be remembered here, and long may the race survive upon this spot which they made forever memorable!

And as it is character, not numbers, that distinguishes a city, I trust that no citizen of Newburyport is disturbed by the slow growth of its population. The welfare of a city, or the happiness of its people, does not turn upon its place in a census-table. Moderate growth is natural, healthy, and desirable. The rapid swelling of a city may be no less a symptom or prognostic of disease than the swelling of a limb. It is no ill-fortune that the character, the identity of old Newburyport has not been swallowed up and effaced in the swarming population which now sets toward cities, and submerges others less fortunate than this. There is a satisfaction in thinking of this ancient community, robed in the dignity of her past, content to stand aloof from the hustling crowd in noble disdain of the folly that sees, or thinks it sees, greatness in bigness,—a weakness from which not even statesmen are exempt, even more fatal to nations than to men and cities. It is not difficult to account for the position of Newburyport. But for one of her most characteristic and interesting traits, her people today would be counted by tens or scores of thousands. Newburyport may fairly claim to have been the great colonizing town of the great colonizing county of the great colonizing state of the Union. Immediately after the Revolution, and to some extent before it, her people began to look abroad for “fresh fields and pastures new.” Their pioneer blood would not allow them to rest in one spot, however attractive. The movement thus begun has never ceased. Her people have been scattered like the seeds of the pine, and

like the seeds of the pine they have taken root and grown. There is hardly a quarter of the earth in which they are not to be found. It was said at one of your anniversaries, a few years ago, that in the single city of New York were then living three hundred natives of Newburyport. Her filaments cover the whole North and the great West as with an invisible web, every thread vibrating to her influence and binding some new and distant community to the parent stock. Her children have settled states; they have built towns and founded cities. If you would number the people of Newburyport, look for them by the rivers and bays of Maine, on the hills of New Hampshire, in the valleys of Vermont, where they were among the first pioneers; beyond the Hudson and the Ohio, along the shores of the great lakes, on the banks of the Father of Waters, all over the plains that stretch to the range of the Rockies, and beyond to the Golden Gate—in every prosperous community between the Atlantic and Pacific seas on which the genius of New England has set its mark; wherever New England energy has cleared the forest, planted the soil, opened the mine, or harnessed the stream to the wheels of industry; wherever New England thrift bears fruit of prosperity; wherever the New England conscience strengthens public probity and holds up the standard of public morals; wherever the sterling New England character guides the thought and shapes the policy of states—there you will find the people of Newburyport, still sowing and gathering the harvest first planted on Quascacunquen by Thomas Parker and his little company, near three centuries ago; carrying the old town in their hearts; feeling her own pulsations in their blood; inspired with her memory and vindicating her example;—their numbers, character, and influence bearing witness that if Newbury-

port has lost her own, she has taken the nation in exchange.

What events confront us in the coming half-century which opens with this day, it is not given us to know. There will be changes, many and great. Science has but begun to unlock the secrets and unloose the forces of nature. Thought is everywhere fermenting today, as never before, with the complex problems of human society. Even the character of nations seems changing—let the American people look to it that their own is not transformed. For Newburyport, the vista opens upon the fairest prospects. Seated upon this beautiful spot, where the Merrimac, theme of poetry and romance, returns its waters to the sea; where the eye takes in a prospect of enchanting beauty—the spires and gables of the city, the smiling fields, the solemn woods, the silver river, the majestic waste of ocean;—endowed with every agency devised by man for the promotion of health, comfort, social elevation, and material welfare; planted upon the stable foundation of varied and flourishing industries; alive with intelligence, charity, culture, religion, and crowned with the halo of splendid memories,—such are the happy conditions in which the record of the new half-century begins. May it be written in prosperity. May it be written in honor. May it be such that they who make it can look upon it with satisfaction, and they who come after with gratitude and pride. And when the chapter is closed; when the children of Newburyport, on the returning anniversary, gather about the ancient mother to crown her with the garland of an hundred years; may she say of this generation, with fond remembrance, as she turns her smile undimmed by age on those who then surround her,—“Among all my children who have cherished me with stout hearts and willing hands, they too were worthy of my love and my benediction.”



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